

NOVEMBER 29, 1984

Where any cattle are left in the Shortgrass Country, they are going to have to go on feed about a month earlier than normal. Grass is short and the weeds that are coming on won't be high enough for an old cow until later in the winter. For my part it doesn't make that much difference as I operate on a 11-on and 1-off feeding program. We don't have to cask our cattle in July, giving us a full month to haul off the empty sacks and clean out the barns and feeders.

The first bunch of cows that we've put on feed are eager to come to the pickup, but are sort of picky about eating. I'm sure that last flush of cottonseed cake they devoured in September caused a lot of overdoses on the meal. The few weeks in October when it was too muddy for a feed wagon to leave the house is bound to have put several of the worst protein addicts into withdrawals.

The old devils look good, standing around the feed box, snuffing and trying to jab their heads over the sides of the truck. However, as soon as our bulls have to be replaced, I'm going to switch over to more horn production and less milk production. I've decided that horns don't pull a cow down like nursing a calf does.

Over east of San Angelo last year, I watched a guy winter some three and four year old steers during the hardest part of the drouth and they didn't slip a hair until they slied off in the spring.

I never did get a chance to talk to the steer man, but I heard he did pretty good with them, like maybe \$100 or \$200 dollars loss per head not counting grass and interest. I don't know of any cow and calf operators that did that well. One particularly energetic 4-H Club boy might have beat him by counting his ribbons, but from the way it sounded around the coffee houses, it looked like those steers were the best bet of the season.

When I was a kid in the '30s one of the richest men in the whole country ran big whiteface steers with long horns. His cattle brought him luck instead of the normal misfortune that goes with the hide and hollow horn trade. Every election year, he'd win thousands of dollars on the governor's race. By the time he died he had so much money that the Federal Reserve System could make the M-1 call by running a balance on his checking accounts.

Cowboys had a lot of dreams and ambitions in those days. We'd talk about being trick riders and stunt men for the movies, and riding white horses with guitars hanging on our shoulder to play for beautiful girls that had naturally curly hair. But I think most of all we'd liked to have been able to drive a black Ford car out to a line camp to see about a thousand head of our big steers and maybe tell some old boy like ourselves that he'd better get up earlier and doctor the wormies before they got too bad.

I am going to keep trying to find a way to make money from our cattle. Horns might be good luck charms. At least it'd be a good way to bring back the romance of the West, which by the way at the start of this hard winter, is at a low ebb.